

# First Women's Club Here Was Formed to Send Aid To Chicago Fire Sufferers

By ALICE RYAN ROOD

Women's organizations are an integral part of Eastbay community life in this year of 1934. So closely allied are they with the work of men's clubs and societies, that, in many instances, their purposes and programs are merged in a common interest.

However, in the Spring of 1874, when The Tribune first came into being, there were no women's clubs, and very few women's organizations of any type. Their present day importance is comparatively a recent development and one which was given but little thought in those days of long ago.

Today the principal objective of practically all women's organizations is service, and the same motivating thought brought into existence the first women's society in Oakland.

The Chicago fire in 1871 and the distress of its victims evoked nation wide sympathy. In Oakland a group of women formed the Oakland Ladies' Relief Society to devise measures of affording relief to the thousands who were still homeless and destitute on the eve of a rigorous Eastern Winter.

## FIRST MEETING

The first organized meeting of the society was held in the basement of St. Paul's Church on Twelfth Street, November 9, 1871, and Mrs. A. Dam was named the first president.

Volunteers flocked to headquarters to sew on warm garments which were sent to fire victims in the Eastern city. Records of the society indicate women of all religious denominations and social rank joined in the work.

This same society, its work of mercy for Chicagoans concluded, turned attention to the needy and destitute of Oakland. In June, 1872, articles of incorporation were filed, and constructive work in the realm of local philanthropy was inaugurated.

The society first owned property at Fourteenth and Franklin Streets, a gift from Elijah Bigelow. This was exchanged in 1873 for three acres of the J. B. Woolsey land on the line of the Berkeley Railroad in Temescal, and this in turn was sold and the present site of the Ladies' Relief Home, west of Broadway, in the vicinity of Forty-second Street to Forty-fifth Street, was purchased. The property was known as the Beckwith Place, contained 10 acres and a house. Here were placed the children and elderly women sharing in the merciful administration of the society.

## WORK OF SOCIETY

Through the years the Oakland Ladies' Relief Society has built new homes for its charges; extended help to those in need, and maintained an important place in community welfare work. Miss Matilda Brown has served as its president since 1906, elected for her

twenty-ninth year of office in January of this year.

Another women's organization of early date in the Eastbay was that of the Women's Temperance Union formed in 1874. In those days, a now opinions varied as to the right of saloons to exist and this early day group of women fought valiantly in behalf of their conviction. Mrs. William Hulburt was the first president, and a Harriet Bishop is mentioned frequently in issues of The Tribune of those far away days as speaker for the union.

Daughters of Israel, another society, organized in the interest of philanthropy to all, irrespective of nationality and creed was formed in 1876. Twenty charter members made up the roster, with Mrs. Bettman as president.

The first true forerunner of a woman's club, such as is extant today, under the banner of the California Federation of Women's Clubs, was that of the Oakland Chapter of the American Society for the Advancement of Women organized in 1876 by Dr. A. C. Ebell, who came here from the East, intent upon forming a society for the pursuit of culture.

A group of women, whose first president was Miss Mary Culbertson, today ranks among the oldest women's clubs in the United States.

## NAME CHANGED IN 1877

Its change of name, from its first very flowery designation, was made in 1877, upon the death of Dr. Ebell, and in his memory the Ebell Club was one of the women's clubs who pioneered the California Federation of Women's Clubs in 1900. Today it stands in an honored place in the federation and through the years has maintained and added to its educational and social background. Mrs. Eugene Wellington Roland serves as its president.

Eastbay women who have been members more than a half century are: Mrs. Harry Carlton, 306 Leavenworth Avenue; Mrs. L. F. Cockcroft, Fairmount Avenue; Mrs. Guinevere Earle, 2914 McClure Street; Mrs. Franklin Banks, 2626 Hill Avenue, Berkeley.

Other women's organizations began to spring up with an increasing frequency during the latter part of the '70's. The Good Temple, West Oakland, with Mrs. N. F. Fine as president, sponsored a home for orphans; The Women's Christian Association of Oakland was organized in October, 1877, and during the same year the Ladies' Evangelical and Philanthropical Alliance came into being. Its first permanent headquarters, built some 15 years later, became the headquarters of the Y. W. C. A. The Mistletoe Literary and Social Club and the Linden Reading Club were other women's organizations of this early date.

The beginning of the '80's found women's organizations firmly entrenched in the life of the city, and through the succeeding years they have increased in number and scope of activity in the community.

# It's a facelift-plus for a grand old beauty

By Nina Berglund  
Tribune Staff Writer

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Years ago, its spacious foyers and grand halls were filled with gracious ladies who enjoyed getting together for theater, dining and socializing.

The old Oakland Women's Club flourished in the 1930s, when each month 8,000 women would visit its theater and 12,000 would eat in its dining room.

The club even featured a special smoking room for the women, called "Lady Nicotine."

But the genteel pleasures of that bygone era faded, and the Women's Club faded, too. Lately, its rooms have hosted transient overnight guests and the theater has been showing Kung Fu movies.

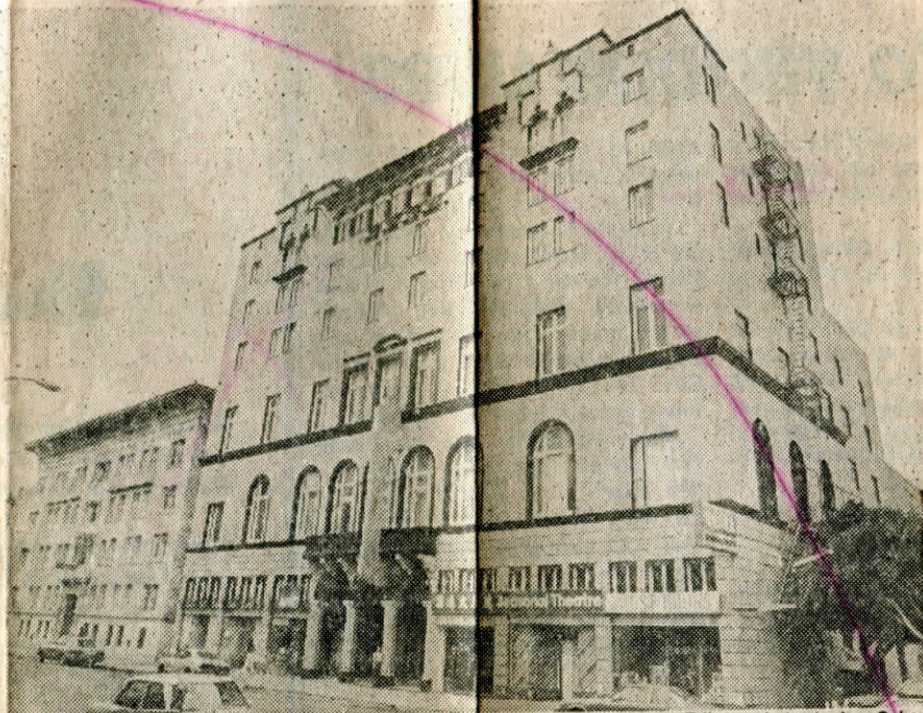
All that will change, however, and a certain degree of graciousness is expected to return to the Women's Club building at 1428 Alice St. this fall when it re-opens as The City Club after a \$1 million renovation.

"We're designing the new facility to fit in with the renaissance that's happening in downtown Oakland," said Susan Page, associate manager of the club.

The new City Club is being billed as "a unique cultural, athletic, social and professional center," and will feature a physical fitness center, a 900-seat theater for concerts, plays, films and dance programs, a rooftop garden patio restaurant and lounge, a nightclub with dancing and entertainment, an art gallery and conference facilities including 45 renovated hotel rooms.

The athletic facilities will include exercise equipment, a swimming pool, spa and sauna. Activities will include exercise classes, organized ski trips, group travel packages and professional development seminars.

It's all the brainchild of Oakland real estate developer Jim Price, who has taken a 30-year lease on the property from owner Raymond Cas-



Tribune photos by Leo Cohen

After a \$1 million renovation, graciousness will return this fall to the Women's Club building at 1428 Alice St., Oakland.

tor. Price plans to refurbish the 80,000-square-foot building in keeping with its 1920s period architecture. Renovations will include exterior improvements such as awnings and street trees.

Built in 1927 by architects Claud B. Miller and Carl I. Warnecke to house the Women's Club, the building's interior features vaulted ceilings, ornately carved doors, foyers and large fireplaces.

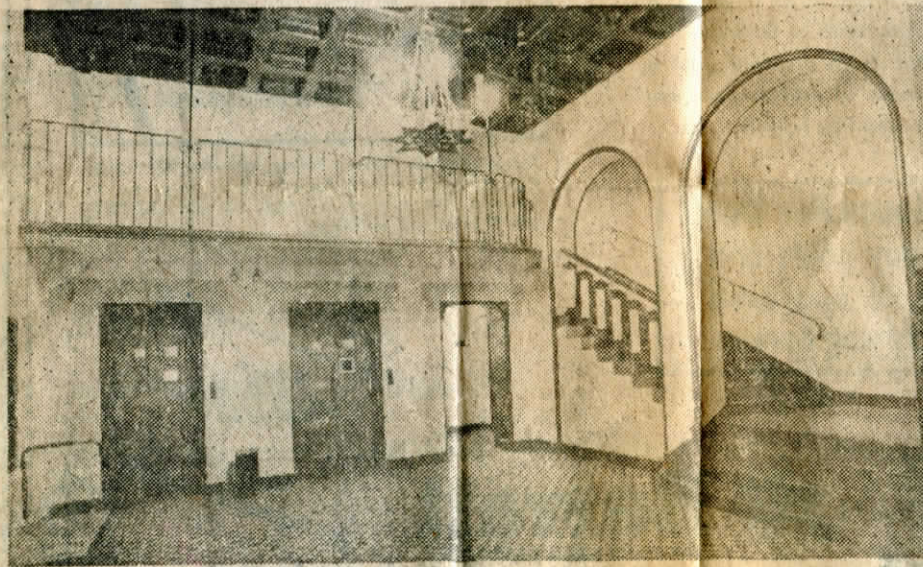
"It's actually in very good condition already and basically just needs to be cleaned up," Page said. "It's the sort of place you're sure you can't afford to be a part of, but we don't want to become a club for the wealthy and have set up affordable membership fees."

Page said the City Club should appeal to business and professional men and women who work in the downtown area as well as to residents of the Eastbay "who want to enhance their social, cultural and professional lives."

"The club will provide a positive, progressive environment for both single people and families to meet," Page said.

Price said he intends to start the renovation work in July and open the club in October. He has set charter memberships at \$300 to \$375 with a monthly fee of \$42.

"We're excited about the prospect and it's just such a beautiful building," Page said. "It deserves to be restored."



Inside the 1927-built building, which will become The City Center Club, are vaulted ceilings, ornately carved doors and large foyers.

# 'A dynamite idea' cannot blast away the fears, refusals

By Nina Berglund  
Tribune Staff Writer

DEC 19 1982

James W. Price's dream is to renovate the old Oakland Women's Club building at 1428 Alice St. and bring it back to life as a private athletic and professional club. And he wants to make some money while he's at it.

But while Price is confident that such a dream can become reality, he has encountered nothing but trouble convincing potential investors that both objectives can be accomplished.

If he doesn't attract the roughly \$350,000 he needs in investment capital soon, Price's idea will be abandoned — a victim of the rocky economy and a general unwillingness by many lenders and investors to commit themselves to anything that involves an above-average degree of risk.

His proposed renovation project — called The City Club — remains indefinitely stalled. He must exercise a 30-year lease option on the building in May, so his time and money are running out.

"I've gotten a lot of 'you can't do this' reactions from people," says the frustrated Lafayette-based developer who first announced his plans last June. "Everyone tends to be so negative these days. I'm finding that a lot of business people now aren't motivated and they aren't willing to risk anything."

He has been rebuffed by several local developers. An attempt to raise money through syndication failed. Investors familiar with renovation have told him he has a great idea, but they're not interested, or their money is tied up elsewhere. He says he even tried to interest concert promoter and entrepreneur Bill Graham in The City Club, "but his office didn't return my calls."

Conventional financing through a lender is out of the question, he says. "They look at this like it's a crap game," he says. "There's no way they'll lend money for something like this."

Price concedes that, from a real estate standpoint, his is a "maverick" project. What he envisions is a club that would offer members a fitness center, indoor swimming pool, restaurant and bar, weekend cabaret, performing arts in the building's 834-seat theater, social activities and programs for personal and professional development — all for a \$500 initiation fee and monthly dues of \$42.

Price says such events would fit in nicely with the stately old building's existing features, which include a 60-foot-long swimming pool in the basement, beamed ceilings, Italian Renaissance design, four working fireplaces, a ballroom and curving staircases.

Price, who lists among his completed projects an office building in Berkeley, a condominium project in Pleasant Hill and a string of custom houses, figures he needs the \$350,000 in investment capital to match seed money he'll put up to get started. He contends he

can complete the entire project — including the renovation of more than 70 hotel rooms that now house weekly and monthly tenants — on a budget of about \$1.3 million.

The largest expenditure in his prospectus is \$300,000 for construction of the fitness facility. Repairing the old swimming pool, for example, should cost \$19,950, and renovating the bathrooms should cost \$23,400, he estimates. Other projected costs include \$3,800 for refinishing the ballroom's dance floor, \$500 for new lighting in the kitchen and \$17,000 for repairing the theater's seats.

But some developers say his costs are underestimated. "If he says he can do it for that amount of money, fine, he can try it," says one local developer active in renovation projects who asked that his name not be used. "But I won't get involved with it."

Price's trouble, according to the developer, is that people he has approached are not convinced he can "pull something like this off. People are just way too conservative to risk something like this these days."

Marsden Cason, chairman of Equitec Financial Group Inc., which turned Price down because his firm specializes in office and apartment buildings, called Price's City Club project "a dynamite idea" that just may have come up at a bad time.

"A lot of people are scared and nervous," Cason said. "People want to invest their money in things that are more proven. And renovation projects are very difficult. Codings are complicated and cost control is a real problem."

While Price is not easily dissuaded, his frustration is building. He has been paying the

building's owner \$3,500 a month to tie up the property and now he's concerned about throwing good money after bad.

He remains convinced there is a demand for a facility like The City Club; he notes that nearly \$400 million worth of new office space will be created within one mile of the club in the next few years and contends workers will want a place to eat, play and socialize.

May 23 1893

Oakland women's organizations are now in their seventh decade of existence, but little ~~less~~ younger than the city itself, now celebrating its eightieth anniversary.

Mercury was the purpose behind formation of the first women association here. The Oakland Ladies Relief Society had its origin ~~in 1871~~ at the time of the Chicago fire. It was organized November 9, 1871, to assist sufferers of that catastrophe and was incorporated seven months later, June 12, 1872, to render help to the needy and destitute at home. Among names of its founders are those of women from families who played a prominent part in Oakland's development, including ~~those of~~ Mrs. Virginia de Fremery, Mrs. Catherine Kirkham, Mrs. Lucy Dan and Mrs. Cornelia B. Dwinelle. The original membership was thirteen.

The society has continued throughout the years and sees to the welfare of elderly women, babies and children. Miss <sup>Brown</sup> Matilda E. ~~Brown~~ has been its president for the past 28 years.

Ebell Society, the second oldest women's club in the real sense of the word in the United States, was founded in Oakland in 1876 by Dr. Adrian F. Ebell, Yale graduate and noted lecturer of the time on art, literature and women's advancement. The society was a branch of the International Academy. It became a member of the Alameda district Federation of Women's clubs and the California Federation in February 1900. From a small group it has now grown to a membership of more than four hundred women.

Among active members who have been identified with the Society through many years are Mrs. Harry Carlton, 306

Lenox avenue and Mrs. L. F. Cockroft, 385 Fairmount avenue. Both were honor guests at the Society's fifty fifth anniversary tea last December.

The Daughters of Israel Relief Society was organized in 1876 with Mrs. J. J. Bettman as president. A nother organization of a welfare type organized at this time was the Women's Christian Association of Oakland, the object of which was "To carry Christian love, sympathy and help to all families." It maintained a fruit and flower mission, a sheltering home, and industrial committee and helping hand school at the corner of ~~Twenty second~~ <sup>Oakland</sup> and Market streets.

One of the oldest clubwomen in point of years and active connection with federated club work is Mrs. Vasha Wallace Parks, 84, Mrs. Parks who makes her home at 1544 Fifty seventh avenue, lists among clubs to which belongs the East Lake Social Service Club and the Fruitvale Women's club. She was a guest of honor at the annual reciprocity tea of the latter club in January at the Hotel Alameda.

Mrs. Parks knew Lincoln, when as a young girl she worked on Texas newspapers. She ~~has been identified with Federation work since~~ was member of the Tuscola club of Illinois in 1877 and before coming to California served in the Nevada Federation of Women's clubs.

Another pioneer club here which has philanthropy for its purpose is the Oakland New Century club, formed in 1898 and federated with the state and district in 1902. Mrs. Katherine F. Goodall is president.

The Hill club which meets <sup>informally</sup> at the homes of members is said to be the second oldest club in Oakland, having been formed in 1882.

The Oakland club was organized in 1899 and federated with the state and district a year later.